

An emphasis on health care

By The Helena IR - 02/22/07

Home on the range during a Congressional break to speak to a joint session of the Legislature on children's health insurance, Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., dropped by the IR's Editorial Board Wednesday with health care still very much on his mind.

Baucus told lawmakers that both parties should work together to expand the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, which insures children of lower-income families. But, because Montana's eligibility requirements are among the strictest in the nation, CHIP doesn't cover many other kids who also are uninsured.

Baucus said that if the Legislature expands CHIP, he will use his clout as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee to provide more federal dollars for the program.

More generally, Baucus told the IR board, this country needs to address its ever-growing health-care costs — as well as improve its education and become energy self-sufficient — as part of any strategy to keep the United States' position as heavily populated China and India continue to rise on the world stage.

Baucus recently delivered a major speech to the National Health Policy Conference in which he called for universal health coverage for all Americans, with individuals and government working together to help Americans who are unable to buy it. His committee will hold hearings in which the best and most experienced people will discuss health care — hearings "without politics" and with "nothing off the table," Baucus said.

We applaud the senator's commitment to health care, and in particular on expanding health insurance coverage. It's an important issue in a state in which one out of five people go without.